

**IHF FOCUS: Parliamentary elections; freedom of the media; rule of law; religious intolerance; role of the international community; human rights defenders; women's rights.<sup>2</sup>**

The Rakhmonov Government sought legitimation through flagrantly fraudulent parliamentary elections in 2000. The elections marked the last major step of the transitional process outlined in the June 1997 Government-United Tajik Opposition (UTO) peace accord, but important provisions of the agreement were not implemented. Demobilization of troops and reform of government power structures remained incomplete, the 30 percent quota of government posts to be awarded to UTO representatives was never met, and national reconciliation stalled, with next to no representation of Uzbeks or Pamiris either in Government or in the Parliament. Instead, members of the President's Kuliabi regional group retained nearly all important government posts, and the presidential People's Democratic Party (PDP) dominated the Parliament. Human rights protections were also compromised by the Government's increasingly authoritarian rule, and by disorder within law enforcement agencies and internal power struggles among government military and political leaders.

### **Parliamentary Elections**

In the leadup to the February 27 parliamentary elections Human Rights Watch as well as a joint U.N.-OSCE observer mission witnessed state interference in the electoral process that included the obstruction or exclusion of opposition parties, a wholly arbitrary candidate registration process and flagrantly biased coverage by the state media. On election day there were numerous and grave irregularities in the voting. Of sixty-three seats, the ruling PDP gained thirty, and eighteen seats went to candidates who are mostly PDP members or widely acknowledged to be solidly pro-government, although they ran as independents. The Communist Party won thir-

teen seats and the Islamic Renaissance Party two. A joint U.N.-OSCE observer mission noted that the elections failed to meet minimum democratic standards, but calls for the vote to be annulled in some districts or for a recount of the vote went unheeded. Largely uncontested elections to the upper chamber held in March resulted in the election of an overwhelming majority of presidential party members.

### **Freedom of the Media**

Electronic media remained under government control, and independent radio stations remained off the air, as their wait for a license from the Government entered its third year.

◆ In May, Khorog-based state radio employee Umed Mamadponoev was detained by police and "disappeared" after producing a locally aired program on the army mistreatment of soldiers from Gorno-Badakhshan. Local and international sources fear Mamadponoev was drafted by authorities for military service in retaliation for his broadcast, but as of early September, his whereabouts remained unknown.

### **Rule of Law**

Wanton violence by members of law enforcement and other security agencies contributed to overall lawlessness and a precarious personal security situation for most civilians. Human Rights Watch documented numerous cases of extortion, kidnapping, and beating of ordinary civilians by Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Defense, and Ministry of Emergency Situations personnel. Members of these units were also responsible for unlawful killings of civilians during operations to locate and confiscate illegal arms. The Government made several limited attempts to improve security through these

arms recovery operations and the arrest of members of the armed forces for common criminal offenses. The failure to meet two objectives of the peace accord—demobilization and reform of government power structures—continued to aggravate the security situation.

One positive result was a somewhat improved security climate in Dushanbe, where by June many fewer armed persons and cars with blackened windows were visible, and where residents for the first time since 1992 dared to stay outside into the late evening hours. Nonetheless, sporadic explosions and shootouts continued to occur in the capital. A May presidential decree resulted in the release of approximately 1,000 *kontraktniki* (contract servicemen) from service, but many reportedly remained in service.

Former UTO commanders, based in the Karategin Valley and neither demobilized nor awarded government posts, continued to head independent armed forces, and clashes between these renegade forces and government troops in Darband in late August led to the reported burning of civilian houses and killing of livestock by government forces. Islamic insurgents who invaded Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in August were accused of maintaining bases in northeastern Tajikistan, and former UTO combatants were accused of participating in the incursion.

Violence continued to characterize the political scene.

◆ In Dushanbe on February 16 a bomb exploded in a car carrying Dushanbe Mayor Mahmadsaid Ubaidullaev and Deputy Security Minister and parliamentary candidate Shamsullo Jabirov, fatally wounding the latter.

◆ On May 20, Saifullo Rahimov, chairman of the State Committee on Radio and Television, was assassinated in Dushanbe by unidentified gunmen.

◆ The politico-military climate in the Karategin Valley deteriorated on June 3

when the Chairman of the district of Garm, Sergei Davlatov, was shot down with his bodyguard and driver.

International organizations temporarily evacuated the area after the killing, and at the time of writing, as in the months previous, the Karategin Valley remained off-limits for most staff of international organizations. The year also saw firefights in public venues between the heads of several Kuliabi-headed security units.

### Religious Intolerance

The authorities arrested hundreds of alleged members of the banned Islamic movement Hizb-ut-Tahrir on charges of possession or distribution of anti-state literature and a wide range of criminal activities. In August seven members were sentenced to terms of imprisonment of from five to twelve years on charges of membership in illegal criminal groups and anti-state activities, while another thirty-seven were on trial in Leninabad on identical charges at the time of this writing. International organization staff and local sources reported that these arrests and trials were accompanied by incommunicado detention and physical mistreatment.

### The Role of the International Community

In the face of systematic corruption, a politically influenced judiciary, and rampant security force abuse, senior representatives of international and humanitarian organizations working in the country and regional specialists called frequently for human rights conditions to apply for funding from the Bretton Woods institutions and other financial bodies.

The World Bank conducted a major poverty assessment in 2000, with an aim to establish a poverty reduction program and provided credits totaling close to U.S.\$ 200 million. The Asian Development Bank gave U.S.\$ 120 million for agricultural, education, and health care reform, while

Islamic Development Bank representatives and the Coordination Group of Arab Foundations committed funds for health and infrastructure projects. China contributed some U.S. \$700,000 for military technical support.

#### United Nations

In spite of grievously flawed elections, the unfulfilled peace agreement, and a precarious security situation, the United Nations Mission of Observers to Tajikistan (UNMOT) terminated its mandate on May 15. UNMOT's support for rushed elections at the expense of human rights goals and long-term political stability seemed at least partially designed to justify the peacekeeping mission's premature exit from the country. This haste to withdraw was illustrated by the closure of its field offices, whose personnel had been tasked with overseeing and monitoring the parliamentary elections, even before the runoff votes had been held. UNMOT was replaced by a U.N. Tajikistan Office of Peace Building (UNTOP), manned in Dushanbe by only a handful of international staff members.

#### Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

In 2000 a Khujand field office was added to those already in place in Shaartuz, Dusti, and Kurgan-Tiube, while an OSCE presence was maintained in Garm by a local staff member. The mission led a joint U.N.-OSCE election observation team for the February parliamentary elections and produced a comprehensive report which noted that the elections failed to meet minimum democratic standards. Noteworthy initiatives included a high-profile intervention on behalf of a prisoner facing capital punishment, a sentence later commuted to imprisonment, and access to prisons by the mission.

#### The Republic of Uzbekistan

The first official service flight in nine years flew once between Dushanbe and

Tashkent in August but was canceled when later in that same month Uzbek-Tajik relations soured following clashes between Islamic insurgents and government troops in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Uzbekistan subsequently sealed its borders with Tajikistan, and a visa regime between the two countries became effective in September.

#### Russian Federation

Russia kept a firm military presence in Tajikistan through its 201<sup>st</sup> Motorized Rifle Division, the thousands-strong Russian Border Forces, and a permanent Russian military base in Khujand, and through support for antiterrorist and anti-drug trafficking activities. Russia threatened to conduct air strikes against alleged Chechen training bases in Afghanistan. Russia failed to use its military ties to encourage measures to curb the lawless and abusive practices of the Tajik security forces.

#### United States

Although United States Embassy international staff were relocated in September 1998 to Almaty for security reasons, the "suspended operations" status of the U.S. embassy was lifted in late 1999, and United States embassy personnel based in Almaty traveled regularly to Dushanbe. The U.S. Agency for International Development's budget for Central Asia suffered close to a 30 percent cut, and the agency elaborated a strategy to collaborate mainly with in-country NGOs and local government, particularly in the areas of health and environment. The State Department's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1999* provided an unbiased and in general accurate review of the sorry state of human rights in Tajikistan

#### **Human Rights Defenders**

As in previous years there was little human rights monitoring by local groups, but a victory of sorts was shared by local women's NGOs when an unfair death sentence imposed on twenty-one-year-old

Dilfuza Numonova was commuted in July. The move to commute her sentence had been spearheaded by international organizations, but many local women's organizations signed petitions to the Government in her support.

The OSCE mission gained access to several of the country's prisons and shared

its findings with international medical humanitarian organizations, one of which subsequently implemented an assistance program. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) continued to be denied access to prisoners in accordance with its standard procedures.

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### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> As reported in *Human Rights Watch World Report 2001*. Reporting period: November 1999 through November 2000.
- <sup>2</sup> See IHF, *Women in 2000, an Investigation into the Status of Women's Rights in Central and South-Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States*, November 2000.